

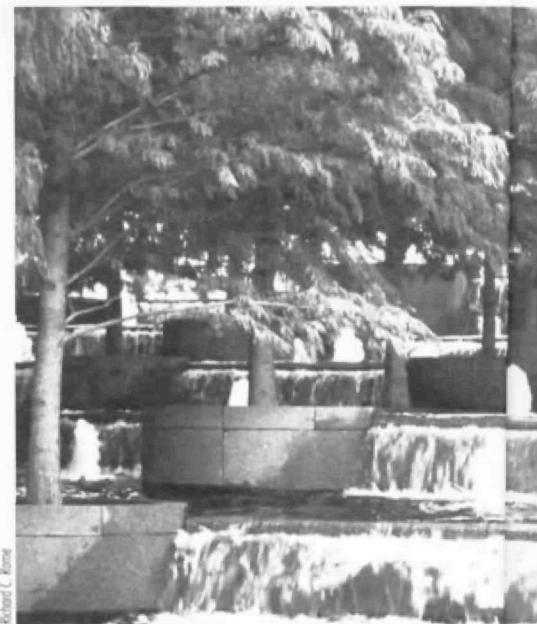


Rite of Spring Fountain: *The Firebird*, Place Igor Stravinsky, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France. Nikki de Saint-Phalle, sculptor, 1983.

*Intellectuals think that we live in a world of ideas which we invent. . . . But deep inside of us is a wilderness. . . . The collective unconscious is a great wild region where we can get in touch with the sources of life.*

— Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols*

The human need for water goes far beyond biological necessity. It is a need born of our deepest instincts, captured in myth and celebrated in pageantry, art, and spectacle. In Greek mythology, water, equated with life itself, was the home of the Nereids and naiads, who beckoned mortals in the ancient world with their beauty and immortality to partake of the natural wonders and sensuous pleasures of brooks, springs, rivers, and the sea. Water entices and



Fountain Place, Dallas, Texas, Dan Kiley, landscape architect, 1989.

# F o u n

Richard C. Rome

captures the human mind, prompting thoughts of solace, freedom, and spiritual rebirth.

Cities are no less connected than their individual inhabitants to the need for water. Indeed, the presence of water often determined settlement sites, and many cities became great because of the abundance and quality of their waters. Harbors, rivers, springs, and fountains provide the lore of historical city life, and perhaps nowhere has this happened more gracefully than in Rome. Yet it was not the Tiber that bathed Rome's citizens and quenched their thirsts. It was the fresh water from mountain springs that reached imperial Rome via an elaborate system of aqueducts that fed her public bath houses, which were unprecedented in their number, scale, and sumptuousness.

The Roman fountains that have endured remind visitors and residents how water can shape and distinguish an urban environment. The Trevi Fountain locked within its tiny square; the Tortoise and Triton fountains surviving the ever-rising tide of Fiats; the Fountain of the Four Rivers majestically afloat in the Piazza Navona; and the Barcaccia washed up at the base of the Spanish Steps shape our memories of Rome. By commissioning these works of great art and design, the powers of both ancient and Renaissance Rome not only provided signification of its water sources but bequeathed a layering of richly varied civic monuments to the city. These engaging landmarks enrich one's perception of the city and provide neighborhoods and districts with identifying imagery. The engineering brilliance of early Roman aqueducts has been surpassed in the modern era, but it is questionable whether the splendor of Renaissance fountains has

Richard Fitzgerald & Partners, 1985). Of course innumerable fountains and pools dot and sometimes enliven other Texas cities. There is no shortage of Texas fountains, but there is often a lack of critical mass. Tranquillity Park in Houston (Charles Tapley Associates, 1979), for example, makes a gesture toward being a water feature but lacks the succession of experiences that build upon one another to create a true water garden. The possibility for a change in context explains the popular success of Houston's Transco Fountain and Park, which offer a series of spaces and environmental moods in addition to the grand spectacle of its water wall. If the reflecting pool envisioned in the original scheme had been constructed, the park would have achieved most of that to which a water garden aspires.

Like a successful fireworks display, a water garden assumes its own character and tempo. The immense power of a

and water. Even some of the most successful fountains in terms of water play have no architecture connected with them at all, either as a backdrop or integrated into the fountain design. These include the Mecom Fountain (Eugene Werlin & Associates, 1964) at the intersection of Montrose Boulevard and South Main Street and the Jesse H. Jones Fountain (SWA Group, 1983) at the intersection of Fannin and Greenbriar near the Astrodome, among several others, whose only constructed components are mere saucers to contain the water. This is adequate for the three-part Mecom Fountain, where the high water jets are always in operation and the landscaping is always perfect. It is an eyesore in the case of the Jones Fountain, which never seems to be turned on, so all one sees is a dry concrete lip looking desolate. The Jesse Jones Fountain was given to the city by Houston Endowment Inc. with the understanding that it would be maintained by

den's light towers in the early 1990s resulted in the death of two visitors to the park, and hundreds of thousands of nesting birds in the garden's now mature trees have created serious health hazards for both park users and plants. Along with new accessibility standards imposed upon public parks by the federal government, these necessitated a total renovation plan for the property.

The expense will be staggering. Yet the impact such a garden has upon an urban area is incalculable. Much like the network of fountains that energizes Rome, the Water Gardens contribute significantly to Fort Worth's urban countenance. Currently enjoying a remarkable renaissance of street activity and urban night life, downtown Fort Worth has become a major regional entertainment center and weekend destination. Replacement of the central elevated freeway with a landscaped, at-grade boulevard will undoubtedly enhance opportu-



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Trevi Fountain, Rome, Italy, Nicola Salvi, architect, 1762.



Richard C. Bone

The Water Gardens, Fort Worth, Texas, Johnson/Burgee Architects, 1974.

# tains & Fireworks

been duplicated in the 20th century.

The use of water as a feature in urban centers takes many forms, from isolated fountains to grand water gardens. Like fireworks, fountains delight in direct proportion to their serial perception; a single fountain is a joy and a pleasure, but a series of fountains in combination with pools and waterfalls provides an urban spectacle.

Texas cities have produced several significant water features: the River Walk in San Antonio (Robert H. H. Hugman, 1941); Town Lake in Austin (a dammed segment of the Colorado River); the Water Gardens in Fort Worth (Johnson/Burgee Architects, 1974); Fountain Place in Dallas (Dan Kiley, 1989); and the Transco Fountain in Houston (Johnson/Burgee Architects and

flood-swollen river can be evoked through careful choreography of synco-pated jets and geysers. Or the peacefulness of a calm lake can be achieved through properly scaled and sited pools. But an individual fountain, no matter how clever in detail and rich in metaphor, can only offer a single spectacle. Even if its display is varied, its context and environment are static. Houston's downtown fountains, such as those at Allen Center and Sam Houston Park, offer individually satisfying water moments, but they lack the power of an intentional series of coordinated water features, and they resist linkage in the viewer's eye and consciousness due to their idiosyncratic designs and water displays.

Most Houston fountains also lack sufficient interplay between architecture

Houston's Parks and Recreation Department. On a recent visit to all of the city-owned fountains, including the Jones Fountain, half of them were not in operation, leaving one to question Houston's stewardship of these public amenities (see *Fifty Fountains*, p.12).<sup>1</sup>

Fort Worth's Water Gardens demonstrate what kind of commitment a community must make to sustain a major public water park. The \$3 million price tag for the current renovation of the Water Gardens is equal to the park's original cost in the early 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Even with an annual operating budget of about 10 percent of the original construction cost, the project has suffered the fate of other urban water gardens and fountains — gradual decline and incremental mechanical failure. The collapse of one of the gar-

nities for expanded use of the Water Gardens. While such a public amenity cannot alone revive urban life, it can provide a key ingredient shared by all great urban centers — a place for impromptu entertainment and relaxation, a place to see and be seen.

Because Rome is full of such places, every visitor there has been tempted into the city's night to explore its charms and hazard its dangers. The piazzas and their fountains beckon crowds by energizing a cold, wet winter night and by alleviating the hot sun of a summer afternoon. Water gardens, not unlike a lake's edge or an urban river bank, offer much the same invitation. As long as crowds provide ambient security and authorities provide real security, such places enliven and animate the urban scene around the clock.

They create place-specific memories and give special images to record a visit. Photographs taken at the Fort Worth Water Gardens or along San Antonio's River Walk cannot be mistaken for those taken elsewhere. They are icons of urban Texas. The captivating quality of a collection of water features elevates a setting to urban theater, making it memorable and conferring an identity.

Water displays can go hand-in-hand with artistic achievement. Bernini's heroic stoneworks give their piazzas mythical and magical import. Likewise, Johnson/Burgee's Fort Worth water cascade creates a roar and a spectacle missing from most urban parks. When landscape architect Dan Kiley was questioned about his inspiration for Dallas's downtown Fountain Place, an equally successful water experience, he quoted Genesis: "And a river went out of Eden."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps all great water features are conceived with Biblical references. Charles Moore, who created a number of memorable water features, in his poetic work *Water + Architecture* quoted Nicolò Salvi, architect of the Trevi Fountain: "Fountains and the water they give forth can be called the only everlasting source of continuous being."<sup>4</sup>

Johnson/Burgee's intentions for the Water Gardens in Fort Worth are similarly abstract and grandiloquent. Like Kiley in Dallas, the architects were inspired not by what their site offered, but by what it lacked. Unlike Bernini, whose inspiration came from context and milieu, Kiley and Johnson/Burgee saw the cores of these Texas cities as hostile to civic art and as unfinished places. Through the eyes of European or even East Coast urbanists, the fabric and topography of Houston, Dallas, and Fort Worth offer little inspiration: these cities are automobile oriented and given to architectural hyperbole rather than coherent urbanist vision. For an outdoor space to succeed in the flat, hot Texas environment, it must overcome a boring site and provide an alternative vision — a virtual place that creates its own space, time, and climate.

The park at Transco Tower in Houston offers many of the same lessons as the Fort Worth Water Gardens. Both create a mythical mindset that seeks to capture a history that never was. The meaning of a landscape is a combination of what users bring to it and what the design evokes.<sup>5</sup> The design of public spaces needs powerful expression and forceful creative imagination, but serendipity can play an important role as well.<sup>6</sup> Successful public spaces are those that the public accepts and makes its own. They must be safe, populated day and night, and they must instill pride and a sense of ownership in their users; yet they can be neither too abstract, lest they lose their sensual qualities, nor too literal, lest they become boring and lifeless.

Susan and Geoffrey Jellicoe have pointed out that our society is not, as it was during the Baroque period of Versailles and the Vatican, constant and

static. They suggest that in our world the "only constancy is change, and therefore movement." Water therefore is the most appropriate civic symbol, for "Water is movement."<sup>7</sup> The two essential states of water, quiet movement and active movement, are seen by the Jellicoes as being akin to the art movements of the abstract (quiet) and the constructive or geometric (active). In his plan for Moody Gardens in Galveston, Jellicoe employed both states of water to a remarkable degree, and the plan contains tributes to his favorite water environments: the Generalife, Shalamar Bagh, Katsura, the Villa d'Este, the Villa Lante, and Isola Bella. It is not surprising that the link between Jellicoe's garden worlds is a river voyage through both time and geography.

A crucial question of water gardening remains: How can we maintain the architectural use of water, skillfully captured and displayed for our pleasure, when the agent is so universally corrosive? Budgets for the gardens in Dallas and Fort Worth suggest that 10 percent of the installation costs are minimal for maintenance of operation. It is also a reasonable expectation that after 25 to 30 years, renovation and improvements will run near the initial capital expenditure. Such high figures might lead decision makers to question the wisdom of constructing water features in the first place, but as a society we know that great civic art through the centuries has proven to be worth any expense.

While it is difficult to measure the pride and enjoyment residents find in returning time and time again to a dynamic water-play, it is impossible to assess the value of a visitor's gasp of recognition upon seeing that which had before been seen only as a video image or glossy photograph. We travel to those places that captivate our imaginations and offer us unique and memorable imagery. The greatest and most alluring of such places almost always include water. ■

1 A list of all "decorative fountains" owned and maintained by the City of Houston was supplied to *Cite* by the Parks and Recreation Department in December 1996.

2 Huitt-Zollar, *Fort Worth Water Gardens—Architectural/Engineering Assessment* (Fort Worth/Dallas, 1994); and author's interview with Robert P. Riley, Superintendent of Park Planning and Resource Management, City of Fort Worth Parks and Community Services, 1996.

3 Patricia Lee Quaid, *Landscape Palimpsest: Layers of Meaning in the Dallas Built Landscape* (Arlington: University of Texas Press, 1966).

4 Charles W. Moore and Jane Lidz, *Water + Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), p. 49.

5 Quaid.

6 Amos Rapport, *The Meaning of the Built Environment* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982).

7 Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe, *Water — The Use of Water in Landscape Architecture* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971).

## Fifty Fountains

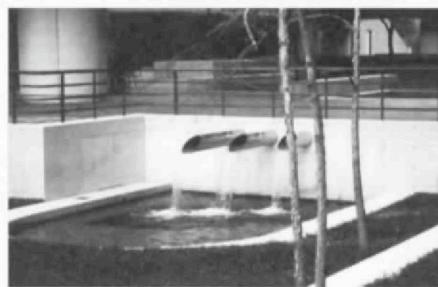
Barrie Scardino

*Houston has more fountains than you think. For what we thought would be a very short side-bar to Richard Rome's **Fountains and Fireworks**, Cite began to look at Houston fountains, beginning with a list of those owned by the City of Houston (\*). We found many more fountains and water features than we imagined existed in Houston. Although a few of the city fountains are inoperable, depending on wind velocity and maintenance schedules, all of them are off at one time or another. New fountains in restaurant courtyards, office and hotel plazas, and apartment/condominiums are literally springing up everywhere. The following list is by no means complete, but it contains some of our favorites.*

### DOWNTOWN



4. \*BALDWIN PARK, 1701 Elgin Street. 1910. This sad concrete dish is forlorn and waterless in an unkempt area with no sign of life.



1. ALLEN CENTER FOUNTAIN, 1200 Smith Street. ca. 1977. The SWA Group. Moving water flows from stepped orthogonal pools under a bridge and spills into a lawn-edged pool from three silvery tubes.



5. CULLEN BANK TOWER FOUNTAIN, 1600 Smith Street. 1984. The SWA Group. A wall slit on Pease lets passers-by see this plaza and fountain from an unusual vantage point.



2. ALLEN CENTER DWARVES, 1200 Smith Street. ca. 1977. The SWA Group. Doc, Dopey, Sneezzy, Sleepy, Grumpy, Happy, and Bashful are hi-bo-ing it off to work in Allen Center.



6. GLENWOOD CEMETERY FOUNTAIN, 2525 Washington Avenue. 1871. This three-tier fountain originally stood in Market Square; it was moved to Glenwood Cemetery long ago.



3. \*HECTOR AZIOS FOUNTAIN, Guadalupe Plaza, 2311 Runnels Street. 1988. Luis Bodmer, architect; George S. Porcher, landscape architect. This three-tier carved stone fountain is set in an interesting pool next to the failed El Mercado del Sol.



7. HELLMAN-BALDWIN FOUNTAIN, Christ Church Cathedral, 1117 Texas Avenue. ca. 1975. Gregory Catlow, landscape architect. This stone basin fountain carved in New York enhances a pleasant churchyard oasis in the middle of downtown Houston.